



# **Internal Audit Report**

**STAR Call Center  
October 2001**



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# Internal Audit Department

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October 12, 2001

Janice K. Brewer, Chairman, Board of Supervisors  
Fulton Brock, Supervisor, District I  
Don Stapley, Supervisor, District II  
Andrew Kunasek, Supervisor, District III  
Mary Rose Wilcox, Supervisor, District V

We have completed our FY 2002 review of the Maricopa County STAR Call Center. This audit was conducted in accordance with the Board approved audit plan. Our review focused on how well that the department serves its customers and provides information to the public.

Overall, we found the STAR Call Center to be a well managed operation that effectively carries out its mission. Our findings are presented in the attached report. The highlights are:

- The elected officials' departments are very satisfied with services provided by the STAR Call Center. The call center has established effective controls for monitor incoming calls and the quality of services provided.
- Benchmarking activities with eight comparable counties identified only one (Dade County Florida) that has established a centralized call center similar to Maricopa County's STAR Call Center
- The STAR Call Center has implemented adequate general information system controls to ensure the integrity and security of its data. The controls include appropriate user access levels, physical security of computer systems, adequate backup procedures, and a written disaster recovery plan.

We have attached our report package and the STAR Call Center's response, which we have reviewed with the director. We appreciate the excellent cooperation provided. If you have questions or wish to discuss items presented in this report, please contact George Miller at 506-1586.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ross L. Tate".

Ross L. Tate  
County Auditor

# Table of Contents

## Executive Summary

Introduction	1
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Department Accomplishments	3
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Detailed Information	4
----------------------	---

Department Response	8
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# Executive Summary

## **Services and Performance**

Page 6

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## **Benchmarking**

Page 8

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## **Information System Controls**

Page 9

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# Introduction

## Background

The STAR Call Center was established in 1996 through the STAR Board Charter; an agreement developed by the County Treasurer, Assessor, and Recorder. The call center became a separate agency in Fiscal Year (FY) 1997. During FY 2000, the Clerk of the Superior Court (COSC) joined this cooperative effort. These elected officials agree that all customer telephone inquiries should be handled by a single call center in order to promote economy, efficiency, and public convenience.

The offices of these elected officials have benefited greatly from the STAR Call Center. Their phone systems are no longer overloaded with phone calls that had previously caused entire systems to shut down. The call center answers eight public assistance numbers and provides services using “live” information technicians (agents). The agents can answer questions and provide information, on many different subjects, which eliminates the need to transfer callers between agencies.

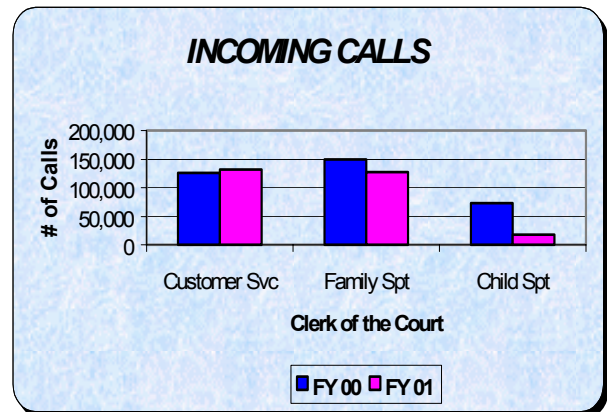
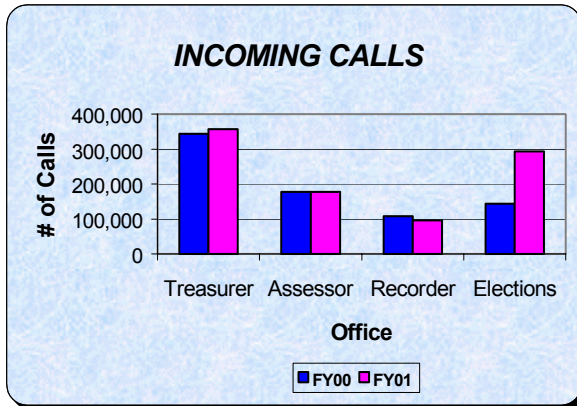
The call center is authorized 33 positions, including 28 agents, for FY 2002. Their major functions are to answer telephones and provide information, both over the phone and by mail. Agents are assigned to two functions/sections:

- County switchboard, Treasurer, Assessor, and Recorder/Elections (STAR)
- Clerk of the Superior Court.

## Mission and Goals

The STAR Call Center's mission is to provide knowledgeable, courteous and efficient answers in response to all incoming telephone inquiries to the Treasurer, Assessor, Recorder, Elections and Clerk of the Court offices and to operate the main County switchboard in the same manner. The call center has developed strategic goals to support this mission.

The call center director monitors progress made toward goals using a call delivery software package that generates workload/performance statistics, such as the number of incoming calls to the different sections. The graphs on the following page show this activity for the last two fiscal years.



## Expenses and Revenues

The STAR Call Center was originally funded by the resources of the elected offices that established the call center. Now the call center is funded as a separate General Fund agency with a budget of \$1.3 million for FY 2002. The call center generates no revenues. Personnel costs and rent comprise more than 90 percent of the expenses.

## Scope and Methodology

Our audit objectives were to determine:

- How well the STAR Call Center handles calls and provides information to callers
- To what extent that the elected officials' offices, served by the call center, are satisfied with the services received
- If other comparable counties have established call centers and for what purposes they are utilized.

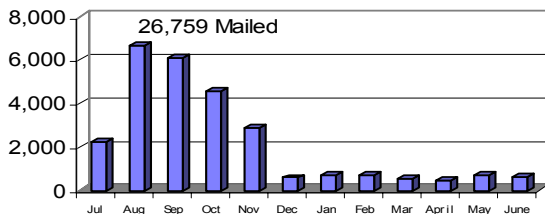
The audit was performed in accordance with Government Auditing Standards.

# Department Reported Accomplishments

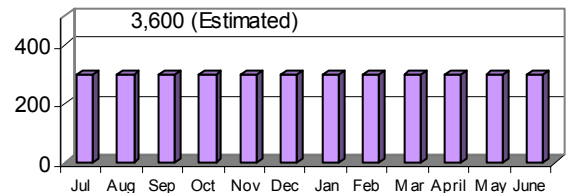
## STAR INFORMATION CENTER ONE STOP SHOPPING FOR RESIDENTS: FY00/01 REPORT

**1.2 million calls and 150,000 requests for next day documents and early ballots**

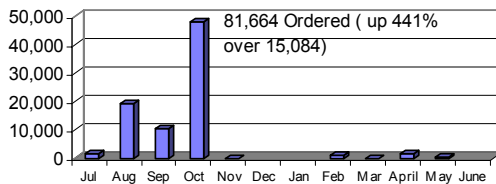
**VOTER REGISTRATIONS FY00/01**



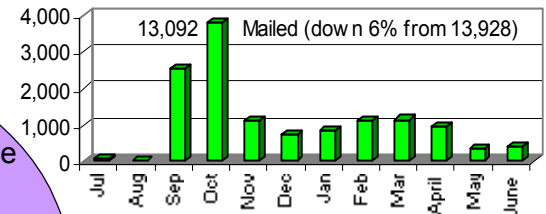
**CLERK PYMT / DEPOSIT FORMS FY00/01**



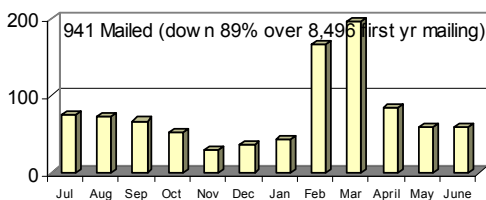
**EARLY BALLOTS FY 00/01**



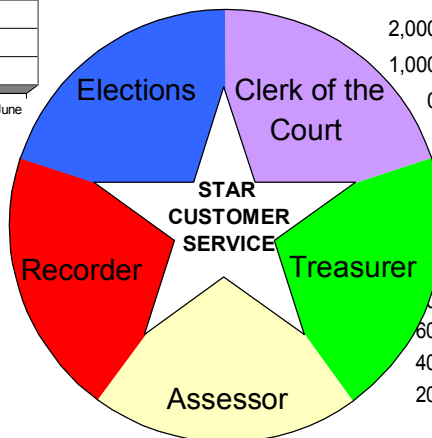
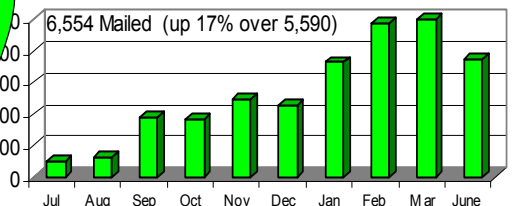
**TAX BILLS FY00/01**



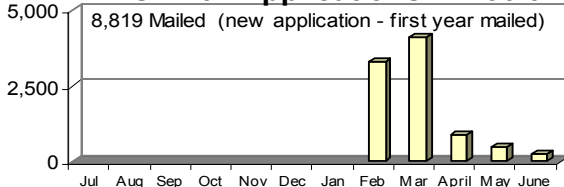
**LANDLORD REGISTRATIONS FY00/01**



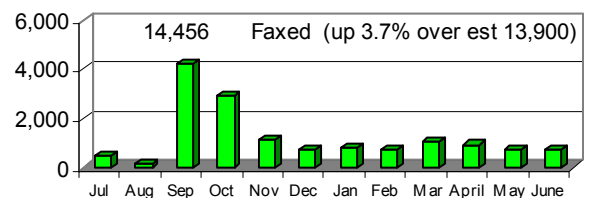
**GENERAL TAX INFO FY00/01**



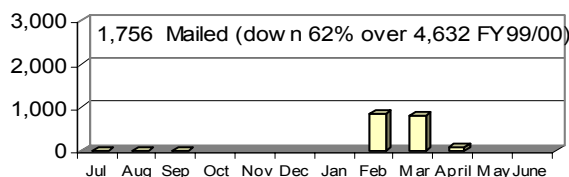
**PROP 104 Applications FY 00/01**



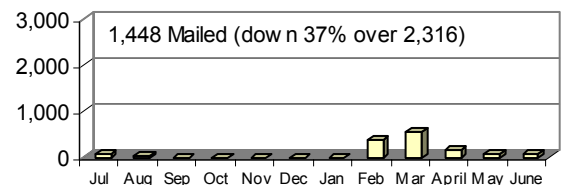
**TOUCHTONE FAX ORDERS FY00/01**



**PROPERTY VALUE PETITIONS FY00/01**



**NOTICE OF VALUE STMTS FY00/01**





# Issue 1 Services and Performance

## Summary

The elected officials' departments are very satisfied with services provided by the STAR Call Center. The call center has established effective controls for monitor incoming calls and the quality of services provided. We found that information technicians effectively answer the public's inquiries and provide information in a timely manner

## Customer Service

The STAR Call Center was established to improve telephone customer service provided by four elected officials' departments. We interviewed managers from these offices to determine their satisfaction, with the call center, in the following areas:

- Overall performance
- Organizational structure
- Usefulness of call center performance/activity reports and call monitoring
- Cost effectiveness
- Expansion of services.

The call center has developed formal call answering procedures along with a critical goal to answer 80 percent of the calls received within 30 seconds.

## Customer Satisfaction

Representatives from all of the elected officials' departments reported a high level of satisfaction with the Call Center and the current organizational structure. Each office noted specific examples:

- In response to customer demands, the call center has automated the process of generating duplicate Treasurer bills/receipts and Assessor valuation notices.
- The call center has developed two-way communication mechanisms beyond basic agent training, such as, attending departmental staff meetings and participating in a department's new hire training.

Most of the offices utilize the call center's performance reports to plan peak period activity, determine the impact of public mailings, monitor call wait times, or to help schedule future television or radio interviews.

The elected officials also believe that the call center is more efficient than having each individual department support their own calls. Centralization has reduced the number of transferred calls, within the County, and also decreased the number of times that their department's employees are interrupted from daily jobs duties by phone calls.

We found that the call center monitors its agents for call answering quality and completeness. Total calls by skillset and agent are also reviewed on a regular basis. The process utilized for answering incoming calls are based on the next available agent's skill level.

To physically observe call center operational performance, Internal Audit Department staff members made 15 phone inquiries ("test calls") to the call center during peak work periods and found:

- All inquiries were answered accurately and 14 (93%) of the calls were described as ending satisfactorily.
- 9 (60%) of the calls were answered in less than 30 seconds and 4 (27%) others were answered within one minute.
- One call was put on hold for 3 minutes.
- Agents were pleasant, professional, and understood the questions asked but did not identify themselves or the department in 4 (27%) of the calls, as called for by internal procedure.

### **Overall Impact**

The results of our customer interviews generated overall favorable results and no exceptions that would be likely to negatively impact the call center's effectiveness. The call center director is re-examining the procedural requirement of having agents identify themselves.

### **Recommendation**

None, for information only.

## Issue 2 Benchmarking

### Summary

Our benchmarking activities with eight comparable counties identified only one (Dade County Florida) that has established a centralized call center similar to Maricopa County's STAR Call Center. The other counties contacted utilize switchboards that transfer calls to the appropriate departments.

### Benchmarking Activities and Results

Four County elected officials' offices utilize the STAR Call Center to provide complete and accurate information to the public. Utilization of the call center helps eliminate call transfers and minimizes abandoned call rates. Prior to conducting this audit, we did not know if other comparable counties utilize similar operations.

We contacted eight comparable counties nationwide to determine if those counties have established a centralized call center and, if so, find out if the call centers have been beneficial. The counties surveyed are:

Clark (NV)	San Diego (CA)	Harris (TX)	Dade (FL)
Orange (CA)	King (WA)	Pima (AZ)	Multnomah (OR).

Only Dade County Florida reports utilizing a call center, which is an expanded version of the STAR Call Center. Dade County's serves all county departments and has been in operation for eight years. The concept is to establish one phone number for citizens to call with questions regarding anything related to the county's services.

In March 2001 Dade County implemented its Voice Communication Management System (VCMS). The system projects a "Wall Board" showing the number of calls received, how many agents are logged in, and how long a call has been holding. The system generates monthly and annual reports which can be sorted by operator, language used, or by sector of the County.

In cases of emergency or evacuation activation (due to hurricanes, etc.), the line becomes a 24 hour/7 day operation. Volunteers from the Red Cross, Emergency Management, and other agencies answer phones calls in addition to the regular operators.

### Recommendation

None, for information only.

# Issue 3 Information System Controls

## Summary

The STAR Call Center has implemented adequate general information system controls to ensure the integrity and security of its data. The controls include appropriate user access levels, physical security of computer systems, adequate backup procedures, and a written disaster recovery plan.

## General IS Controls

The STAR Call Center's main system is the Symposium Call Center Software. This application is used for routing and tracking calls received. Management uses its data to evaluate work efficiency and make staffing adjustments as necessary. The call center also uses systems run by the Assessor, Treasurer, Recorder, and COSC. Each department controls user access to their own systems.

Our review of the call center's general information system controls included:

- User access levels and password security
- Physical security of the application server
- Backup and tape storage procedures
- Disaster recovery.

We found that the call center has established adequate controls in each of the above areas including a written Disaster Recovery Plan.

## Recommendation

None, for information only.

## **Department Response**